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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3640
RHMFIS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1513

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000865

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC, DRL, EUR/ACE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2019

TAGS: PGOV KDEM PHUM AJ

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES ROUNDUP, OCTOBER 1-30

REF: BAKU 777

Classified By: Acting Political-Economic Chief Shannon Ross, Reasons 1.
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¶1. (U) This cable is part of a regular series that will summarize major ongoing human rights issues in Azerbaijan. This series aims to pull together many different sources of information into one readable biweekly summary of human rights cases, with the aim of giving a fuller picture of Azerbaijan's complex political environment.

NGO's Lawsuit Against State NGO Council Continues

¶2. (C) On October 26 Economic Court #1 was due to complete the lawsuit initiated by "The Way of Melancholy" Public Union led by Esmira Orujova against the State Assistance Council to NGOs (reftel). The trial did not take place, however, as Orujova submitted an appeal to the court, asking for the judge to recuse himself from the case. In a conversation with EmbOff, Orujova said that Judge Gurban Abbasov told her earlier not to be insulted, but he had to issue a verdict against her due to constant pressure exerted on him. Orujova's appeal was rejected, however, and a verdict is expected in the next few days.

Child Starts Hunger Strike After Father's Arrest

¶3. (U) On September 4 truck driver Mehman Amirkuliayev was severely beaten by three employees of the Ministry of Transportation after he refused to pay a bribe to them. The incident happened in the middle of the day, and thus several passers-by were able to take photographs of the incident, which Amirkuliayev's family has shared with the Embassy. After Amirkuliayev complained to the police about the beating, in echoes of the jailed blogger case he was arrested and charged with beating the government employees,. The driver's 12-year-old son has announced that he is going on a hunger strike to call attention to his father's case. The family reports that the son is in good health for now, and will seek medical help if problems arise. The family has also appealed to the Human Rights Ombudswoman, who has called for a fair investigation of the incident. Amirkuliayev is being held in pre-trial detention.

International Day of Political Prisoners

¶4. (U) On October 27 the Monitoring Group of human rights defenders held an event dedicated to the International Day of

Political Prisoners. A number of former alleged political prisoners attended the event, which was led by well-known human rights defenders Novella Jafaroglu, Saida Gojamanly, and Saadat Bananyarly. Ayanda Zahidova, wife of jailed journalist Ganimat Zahidov, spoke, stating that after the arrest of her husband's accuser (reftel), the entire case against him should be dropped. Arif Hajily of the opposition Musavat Party spoke about the number of persecutions against political activists in 2003, and about appealing to the European Court of Human Rights to solve ongoing issues.

15. (U) Another event dedicated to the day was held on October 28 by Arzu Abdullayeva. At the event journalist Shahvalad Chobanoglu delivered an appeal, signed by a dozen alleged political prisoners, to Torbjorn Jaglan, newly elected Secretary General of the Council of Europe and to Christopher Strasser, PACE rapporteur on political prisoners in Azerbaijan. A heated discussion ensued among participants about the usefulness of the Council of Europe and whether membership in the CoE had improved Azerbaijan's human rights situation at all.

Municipal Candidates Begin Registering
(But Not Opposition

16. (C) On October 27 the Central Election Commission (CEC) held a meeting to discuss several issues for the December 23 municipal elections. The CEC voted to approve authorized representatives (people who can speak for a political party on matters related to the election) from several political

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parties. This includes the ruling party, a dozen pocket opposition parties, and the Hope and Civil Solidarity parties, which are closer to real opposition parties. The CEC announced that so far 20,704 people have applied to run in the election, 18,822 of whom are already collecting signatures for their nomination. The final deadline for nominations is November 13. However, the traditional opposition parties (Popular Front, Musavat, Liberal Party, Democratic Party) had yet to submit any documents for their candidates in the election. Contacts within these opposition parties say they will submit several hundred candidates, but will not compete in many municipalities, as interest in these elections is low. OSCE representatives, after a series of meetings with regional political party representatives, reported that the opposition parties are poorly organized and lack much support, making it difficult for them to put together the paperwork to nominate a significant number of candidates.

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